

Summer Newsletter

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN JORDAN AND THE HOLY LAND



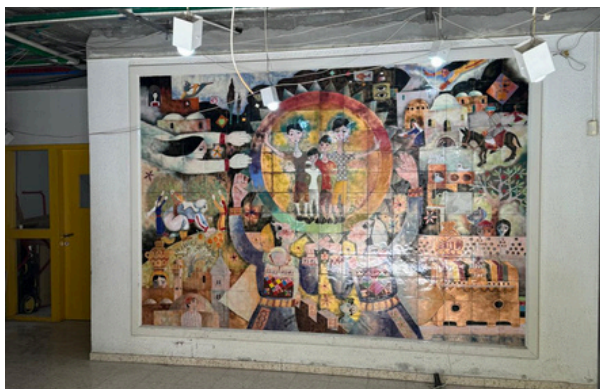
This Summer in the ELCJHL

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Congregations



Retreat in Jericho

For the first time in many years, members of ELCJHL congregations were able to come together for a restful and reflective conference in Jericho. The weekend was filled with worship, faith-based sessions, and time for families to reconnect with each other and with God during a challenging year. As congregations prepare for fall and a new school year, the Congregational Retreat was the perfect time for fellowship and faith formation.



Saying Goodbye to the Aelabounis

July marked the end of the Aelabouni family's five years of meaningful ministry with the ELCJHL. Bishop-Elect Dr. Meghan Aelabouni, ELCA MENA Area Director Rev. Gabi Aelabouni, and their three children Ethan, Natalie, and Luke traveled back to the United States last month, where Rev. Dr. Meghan will serve as Bishop of the ELCA Rocky Mountain Synod. Reverends Gabi and Meghan began their time with the ELCJHL as YAGM Co- Coordinators in 2019. We were blessed to continue ministry with them as Rev. Gabi stepped into his current role with the ELCA and Rev. Meghan into her role as Theologian in Residence and co-pastor of the English-speaking congregation of Redeemer Lutheran. Gabi and Meghan's ministry has been a great gift to our church, and we know they will continue to serve as advocates and ambassadors for the ELCJHL as they start this new part of their journey. Their family will continue to be in our prayers.



Pastor Sally Speaks at ELCA Youth Gathering

In July, Rev. Sally Azar of the ELCJHL traveled to the United States for the ELCA's National Youth Gathering in New Orleans. Rev. Sally was invited to speak on the fourth night of the gathering as part of the day's theme of "Created to be Disruptive." Rev. Sally spoke about how her historic ordination as the first Palestinian woman pastor in the Holy Land was a disruption to the status quo, and how God calls us to be a disruption to unfair and unjust systems in our lives and the world.



Youth Summer Camps

This summer many of our youth had the opportunity to participate in summer camps and conferences! In July, younger youth and teenagers traveled to Jericho for four days of games, presentations, and worship designed to help them reconnect with their faith and navigate this challenging time for Palestinian children. Camps for the younger kids gave older youth the opportunity to serve as leaders. In August, young adults from the church spent three days in Jericho exploring the theme of "Youth Leading the Change." These older youth focused on how they can be part of the solution to the difficulties they face in their communities and beyond, and how their Christian faith can help them navigate that.



Education



First Day of Lutheran Schools

A new school year has begun for the Evangelical Lutheran Schools! Teachers have been preparing for the arrival of students for a few weeks with new workshops and training focused on supporting the educational needs of children during this difficult time. Students began the 2024-2025 school year on August 29th, and there are some exciting changes this year! Talitha Kumi welcomed their new principal from Germany, Mr. Birger Reese earlier this month. Long-time ELS Beit Sahour Deputy Principal Salim Jaber is stepping into a new role as Principal this year, and the school welcomes Amira Qassis Hilal as the new Deputy.

We hope for a safe and peaceful school year where all students can receive unrestricted access to education. As we begin this term, our hearts are with the students of Gaza. We pray they too will return to their schools soon, and we remember those who will never return.



Graduating Students Receive Exam Results

Bishop Azar and the ELCJHL offer sincere congratulations to the the 2024 graduating high school students of all Evangelical Lutheran Schools on their outstanding results on the General Secondary Certificate Examination, which were released in late July. While typically the release of these exam results is cause for celebration, the response this year was subdued as all minds continue to be on the students in Gaza who did not have the opportunity to graduate or sit for examinations this year.



Gender Justice Ministry

Sawasya Program Meeting

Representatives of the Gender Justice Ministry and Al Hakimat Council traveled to Ramallah in early August to meet with members of the United Nations Development Program's Sawasya Programme Palestine to discuss current and future partnership opportunities between the Gender Justice Ministry and the Sawasya program as both work to create a more equal and just society for women in Palestine. We look forward to our future collaborations!

Youth Sessions

This summer has been a great opportunity for the Gender Justice team to lead sessions for youth across Palestine. Recent sessions have included working with the Shepherds Scout Troop in Beit Sahour and with young adults from the Lutheran congregations at their recent retreat. Engaging youth on the topic of how they can be part of creating a more just society for women helps them envision themselves as part of the solution. They are the future!

SBCC Meeting in Beit Jala

The Gender Justice team held a follow-up session this month for young women and Women's Rights Organizations affiliated with YW4A to go over the Social and Behavioral Change Communication (SBCC) plan and how to use the messages in their programming. The plan was developed by the group back in April, and the August meeting aimed to provide participants with a clearer understanding of how to use the messages outlined in the plan effectively in their programming.



Thank You Shadin!

In August Gender Justice Ministry Project Coordinator Shadin Nassar concluded her work with the team after several years of incredible service. Shadin will now hold the role of Regional Associate for Middle East/North Africa with the ELCA, helping ELCA MENA Desk Director Gabi Aelabouni coordinate with local partners on the ground in the MENA area. Congratulations Shadin, and thank you for all your hard work.

Community Support

Our Diaconal Ministry continues to respond to the urgent need for support among congregation members and others in the community who are impacted by the poor and deteriorating economic situation in the West Bank. Throughout the summer, the ministry has focused on individual emergency relief and psychological counseling. By providing financial help for those in need of food, medical assistance, and mental health support, we are able to further reflect the ministry of Christ in the Holy Land.

Diaconia



Renovations Begin

An exciting new project is kicking off at the Diaconal Center. After months of preparation, renovations have begun on the hall, bathrooms, and kitchen of the center. These renovations are primarily to make the center more accessible for elderly and disabled community members. Adapting the building to be more accessible will allow us to offer services and support to more people from the community, and make the center a more welcoming place for all. Keep an eye out for photos of the finished renovations!



Environmental Ministry

The Environmental Education Center hosted a conference to mark the beginning of the fall season in early August. Over 25 youth leaders from the Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem areas met in Jericho for the training, "Caring for Creation, Climate and Environmental Justice." The conference focused on how Palestinian youth can participate in environmental advocacy and implement initiatives that promote biodiversity, protect our natural spaces, and combat climate change. This training also focused on the particular environmental challenges in Palestine today and considered how international humanitarian law relates to environmental protection and access.

The EEC and Director Simon Awad also spent the summer preparing for the return of students to the Evangelical Lutheran Schools. The EEC works closely with the Evangelical schools and is a key part of the educational ministries of the ELCJHL. In the 2024-2025 school year, many students from the Evangelical Lutheran Schools will participate in EEC activities designed to strengthen their connection to their land and teach them how to care for the environment.

Bishop's Corner



Baptismal Site Visit

On August 28, Bishop Azar and Rev. Imad Haddad, Pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Amman, met with church leaders from across Palestine and Jordan and representatives from the Jordanian government for a visit to the Bethany Beyond the Jordan Baptismal Site. This visit recognized the importance of the biblical Baptismal Site for worship and pilgrimages by Christians from all denominations.



Virtual Partnership Visit To Finland

In late August Bishop Azar virtually participated in the partnership renewal between the ELCJHL and our Finnish partners FELM and the Diocese of Kuopio. Though the Bishop was not able to attend in person due to the tenuous situation in the Holy Land, he virtually attended special ceremonies to commemorate the signing of the new agreement, which will last from 2024 to 2028. FELM is one of the ELCJHL's oldest partners and a founding member of COCOP. During the meeting, Bishop Azar gave a virtual speech on peace, hope, and reconciliation during a time of war in Gaza and the region and spoke about the importance of partnership and mutual support in our ministries as Christians in the Holy Land and as a global Church. A sermon written by Bishop Azar was shared at the mass for conference attendees on Sunday morning.

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